

**Testimony of U.S. Agency for International Development
Assistant Administrator Nancy E. Lindborg to the
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Syria's Humanitarian Crisis

Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about the U.S. response to Syria's humanitarian crisis and the great challenges we face. Thank you also for your continued support for our humanitarian programs around the world, which are making a positive difference every day for millions of people.

Introduction

We are facing a grim and escalating humanitarian crisis in Syria. The statistics are numbing: more than 70,000 dead; more than four million people inside the country in need of assistance, including over 2.5 million displaced from their homes. We have already surpassed the somber milestone of more than a million refugees who have fled to the relative safety of neighboring countries, with greater numbers of refugees fleeing the violence each day.

And behind these statistics are the stories of individual Syrians who have lost their homes, their livelihoods and all too often their loved ones. I had a sobering visit to the camps in Turkey and Jordan a month ago with Assistant Secretary Anne Richard and Ambassador Robert Ford. We stood at the border late one night as thousands of Syrians walked across into Jordan, including one young woman who was six months pregnant and fearful she would lose her child.

The United States is fully committed to standing with and supporting the Syrian people. The United States has provided nearly \$385 million in humanitarian aid to date, \$215 million of which is helping those in need inside Syria. And I want to be clear: our funding is not just a pledge; it is being put to work on the ground every day, in some of the areas affected by the worst violence, including Idlib, Aleppo, and Dar'a.

We know that the humanitarian needs are growing; we know our humanitarian assistance will not end the bloodshed. Without a political solution, no amount of aid will turn the tide. At the same time, we also know our assistance has provided a lifeline to help over 2.4 million people in Syria since the violence began two years ago. And our continued, full-throttle humanitarian response is saving lives and is vital to mitigating the impact of an already desperate situation—

for the Syrian people, neighboring countries, and the future of a region at the heart of U.S. national security interests.

The U.S. Humanitarian Response

The United States has fully mobilized resources to provide humanitarian assistance in Syria, where we face the most complex, dangerous and difficult crisis in the world today. Working in tandem with our colleagues from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State, USAID is working through all channels to enable our assistance to reach people throughout Syria. These channels include the United Nations (UN), international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local Syrian organizations and networks – and collectively thousands of dedicated and very courageous humanitarians who risk their lives daily to provide aid inside Syria, including the generous and brave Syrians who are sheltering family and helping those in their communities every day. Our assistance is currently reaching all of Syria’s 14 governorates, and approximately 60 percent is reaching those in contested and opposition-held areas.

To help meet the most urgent needs, we have prioritized the provision of food aid, basic medical care, trauma care, and relief supplies. Throughout the winter, we pushed hard to provide warm blankets, winter clothes, plastic sheeting and mattresses for over one million Syrians who have been forced from their homes, many displaced for the second or third time. Now, as winter becomes spring, warm weather brings a new set of challenges, and our focus will shift to providing clean water, improving sanitation and stepping up hygiene supplies and education to thwart the onset of waterborne disease.

Food

The U.S. is the largest donor for emergency food assistance for those affected by conflict in Syria, including those who have fled to neighboring countries. World Food Program (WFP) activities supported by USAID currently provide monthly rations to nearly 1.5 million within Syria and approximately 300,000 refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. WFP targets for these programs are set to increase in coming months to 2.5 million people inside Syria and 755,000 in neighboring countries. Moreover, USAID’s emergency food assistance delivered through NGOs is providing a life line for vulnerable Syrians in areas where access is most constrained by the conflict.

As civil war disrupts everyday life, the U.S. Government is seeking ways to address critical daily needs in the worst-affected areas. In Aleppo Governorate, for example, USAID is providing

enough flour to more than 50 bakeries to provide daily bread for 210,000 people. Some of these bakeries had been shuttered for nearly three weeks before this program began, and they are now able to operate. Syrian families in these areas have bread, and the bakery owners and workers are once again earning income.

Medical Support

Working through partners, including a cadre of very brave Syrian physicians, we are supporting a life line of essential medical supplies and drugs, trauma training for doctors and support for hospitals and mobile clinics. This assistance is saving lives every day. We just heard a story in which one mother was on the street with her two-year old son when he was shot in the arm. She was able to rush him to a nearby clinic supported by USAID, where doctors treated him for four days, with a hopeful prognosis for full recovery.

As the conflict has continued and the health care system deteriorates, we are seeing a shift from primarily helping those wounded by airstrikes or gunfire to also treating those suffering from more routine ailments. Right now in Syria, the United States is providing support for 144 hospitals, health clinics, and mobile medical units. This includes providing medical supplies and equipment, paying doctors' salaries, and training additional first responders and medical staff. Our medical teams have treated hundreds of thousands of patients, including 35,000 surgeries performed. In addition, we have trained nearly 1,000 people to provide much-needed emergency medical care.

Helping the Internally Displaced

Many Syrians have lost their homes in the war, fleeing with little but the clothes on their backs to stay with host families or find refuge in schools or makeshift camps in Syria. The majority of those displaced inside Syria are living in Syrian host communities already stressed by the ongoing violence, pushing many of these communities into a precarious situation. And many families have been displaced more than once, fleeing as the violence surges through different parts of the country.

Throughout the winter, we provided blankets, heaters, and warm clothes to the displaced and to host families, and we are now providing clean water and improving sanitation, which is critical to preventing the spread of illness and disease. As makeshift camps have sprung up along the Turkish border, such as the Olive Tree Camp in Atmeh, near the Reyhanli border crossing in Turkey's Hatay Province, we are responding with assistance to improve basic personal hygiene also essential to preventing disease. At Olive Tree, U.S. assistance has also established

120 garbage collection points and trash removal services, repaired the water pump, established water trucking, installed a pipe for sewage system, and constructed 140 latrines.

Protection and Psychosocial Support

Each of our humanitarian programs also takes into account protection of the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly. Our field hospitals are providing emergency care and emotional support for children, women and men who have suffered sexual- and gender-based violence. The hours and days following rape are critical to treat injuries related to the assault, prevent infection, and receive the emotional support that will help survivors recover and resume a full life.

After the brutality they have suffered and witnessed, children and adults alike need psychosocial support to help them through this crisis. From helping to form women's groups that encourage discussion to providing vital psychosocial support for children by providing a safe space for them to play and interact with their peers, we are helping to provide ways for Syrians to work through the trauma. With U.S. government support, UNICEF continues to provide psychosocial support to more than 32,000 children in Damascus, Rif Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo governorates, including in conflict locations. In 2013, UNICEF aims to reach 300,000 children throughout the country.

Coordination

In these complex crises, it is imperative to coordinate with other international partners to ensure we make the most of important humanitarian contributions. By working through the UN-led coordination effort for Syria, the humanitarian community can collectively identify, respond to, and meet immediate humanitarian needs without duplication. We continue to encourage our partners and other donors to participate in and support these coordination efforts for the strongest possible international response.

The Syrian Opposition Coalition's (SOC) Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) has assumed an increasingly vital role in coordinating efforts to reach Syrians, especially in opposition-held and contested areas. With support from the international community, the ACU coordinated a rapid needs assessment of Northern Syria, which provided a more complete picture of needs, key affected populations, and priority sectors for assistance.

The United States, the United Kingdom and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs now have full time liaisons in Turkey to work with the ACU. USAID's Disaster

Assistance Response Team (DART) in Turkey participates in the ACU's weekly humanitarian coordination meetings, where partner organizations and others from the international community share information about identified needs and map out current and planned assistance.

The ACU has moved quickly since its formation in November to assume its current role. However, even with these heroic efforts, it remains a nascent institution that needs support. So we are continuing to help the ACU build its capacity to maximize its ability to coordinate and leverage international assistance inside Syria.

Key Challenges

Despite the efforts of the USG and other international partners, Syria's humanitarian crisis is outpacing current response capacity, and we continue to face three significant hurdles that prevent us from reaching all those in need: lack of access, insecurity and insufficient resources

Access

First, the single-greatest factor limiting humanitarian aid is the lack of access. As I noted in my recent comments at the UN- hosted Syrian Humanitarian Forum, we urgently need greater access to forestall the growing humanitarian crisis, including greater access across borders in order to reach the most vulnerable groups of Syrians.

In recent months, we have seen significant breakthroughs in the delivery of assistance across battle lines. Three UN-sponsored convoys of trucks recently reached displaced Syrians in the country's north. As a result of delicate negotiations with the Syrian Government and opposition factions, and with the critical partnership of the SOC, these cross-line operations have made a tangible impact and must continue. But they are logistically complicated and dangerous, underscoring the need for direct, cross-border delivery to meet communities not otherwise easily reached.

Security

Second, with each operation, security is a constant concern, and humanitarian aid workers, particularly medical professionals, are continuing to be targeted for detainments and assassinations. This month, three USAID-funded medical clinics were bombarded in a single day, one of which was completely destroyed by mortar shells, which killed ten people. Our top priority is providing life-saving aid, so we provide assistance in a way that protects both recipients and the courageous aid workers who provide it. Endangering the aid workers would mean undermining the humanitarian effort itself.

For this reason, U.S. humanitarian assistance in Syria is currently provided without branding. We continue to work to find ways that we can selectively brand in order to safely inform the Syrian people that the United States cares deeply about their suffering and is responding as the leading donor and the largest, most proactive provider of humanitarian assistance.

Meanwhile, we are amplifying our message of support to the Syrian people through official visits with intense regional media engagement, including the trip to the Syria-Jordan border I took earlier this year with Ambassador Ford and Assistant Secretary Richard; regularly engaging diaspora groups; and a government-wide push to communicate directly to the Syrian people.

Resources

Finally, to ensure needed resources, it is imperative that all countries help shoulder this burden. On January 30th, the Emir of Kuwait hosted an international pledging conference at a critical moment for raising both awareness and funds for this crisis. Unfortunately, since then, only 21 percent of those pledges have been provided, and funds are running out. We urge all the countries who participated in the conference [?] to follow through on the generous commitments they made. Moreover, this appeal only extends through the end of June. As the humanitarian situation worsens by the day, we continue to focus on mobilizing increased international support.

Conclusion: A Pivotal Moment

Without our continued, full-fledged humanitarian response, the Syrian people may not have the opportunity to realize their democratic aspirations and see their struggle through. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to providing assistance for all those in need inside Syria. We must also continue to support the governments and people of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt and other nations who are so generously hosting refugees fleeing Syria to help ensure these nations can maintain open borders.

Thank you for your time today and for your continued support for our efforts in Syria.

I am happy to take your questions.